

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A gaming machine comprising:
at least one visual display; and
a game of chance depicted on the at least one visual display and controlled by
a processor in response to a wager, the game of chance including a
primary game and a sorting feature, the sorting feature being triggered
by certain start-feature outcomes of the primary game, the sorting
feature including a collection of scrambled objects that are at least
partially sorted during operation of the sorting feature, the sorting
feature generating an award in response to the at least partially sorted
objects matching predetermined criteria.
2. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the objects are selected from a group
consisting of letters, symbols, pictures, and puzzle pieces.
3. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the award is selected from a group
consisting of a payoff, a payoff multiplier, and extended play.
4. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the primary game includes a
plurality of rotatable reels that are rotated and stopped to place symbols on each reel
in visual association with at least one pay line.
5. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the at least one visual display
includes a pair of visual displays.
6. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the visual display includes a video
display.
7. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the collection of scrambled objects
includes a string of scrambled letters of the alphabet which, when fully sorted, form a
word.

8. The gaming machine of claim 7, wherein the string of scrambled letters is fully sorted to form the word in response to a first of the start-feature outcomes.
- 5 9. The gaming machine of claim 7, wherein the string of scrambled letters includes a pair of letters that are swapped in response to a second of the start-feature outcomes.
- 10 10. The gaming machine of claim 7, wherein the sorting feature includes a plurality of player-selectable elements in response to a third of the start-feature outcomes, the string of scrambled letters being progressively sorted to form the word in response to successive selection by a player of the player-selectable elements.
- 15 11. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein the sorting feature includes a non-interactive mode and a player interactive mode, the non-interactive mode being triggered by a first of the start-feature outcomes, the player interactive mode being triggered by a second of the start-feature outcomes, the sorting feature including a plurality of player-selectable elements when in the player interactive mode.
- 20 12. The gaming machine of claim 11, wherein the at least one visual display includes first and second video displays, wherein when the sorting feature is in the player interactive mode, the first display depicts the collection of objects and the second display depicts the plurality of player-selectable elements.
- 25 13. The gaming machine of claim 12, wherein the collection of scrambled objects is progressively sorted to form a fully sorted arrangement in response to successive selection by a player of the player-selectable elements.
- 30 14. A gaming machine comprising a game of chance controlled by a processor in response to a wager and being depicted on one or more video displays, the game of chance including a sorting feature having a string of scrambled letters of the alphabet,

the string of scrambled letters being rearranged during operation of the sorting feature.

15. The gaming machine of claim 14, wherein the sorting feature generates a first
5 award in response to the string of letters being partially sorted during the operation of the sorting feature.

16. The gaming machine of claim 15, wherein the sorting feature generates a
second award in response to the string of letters being fully sorted to form a word
10 during the operation of the sorting feature.

17. The gaming machine of claim 13, wherein the game of chance includes a
primary game including a plurality of simulated spinning slot reels bearing symbols
thereon, the sorting feature being triggered by certain combinations of one or more
15 symbols appearing on the visual display after the reels have been rotated and stopped.

18. A method of operating a gaming machine controlled by a processor, the
method comprising:

in response to a wager, executing a basic game on at least one visual display;
20 awarding a basic game payout in response to the basic game generating a
winning outcome;
executing a sorting feature on the at least one visual display in response to
certain start-feature outcomes generated by the basic game, the sorting
feature including a collection of scrambled objects;
25 at least partially sorting the collection of scrambled objects during operation
of the sorting feature; and
awarding a sorting feature award in response to the at least partially sorted
objects matching predetermined criteria.

30 19. The method of claim 18, wherein the basic game includes a plurality of
rotatable reels, and wherein the step of executing the basic game includes rotating and

stopping the reels to place symbols on each reel in visual association with at least one pay line.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein the collection of scrambled objects includes
5 a string of scrambled letters of the alphabet which, when fully sorted, form a word.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the step of at least partially sorting the
collection of scrambled objects includes fully sorting the string of scrambled letters to
form the word in response to a first of the start-feature outcomes.

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22. The method of claim 20, wherein the step of at least partially sorting the
collection of scrambled objects includes swapping a pair of letters in the string of
scrambled letters in response to a second of the start-feature outcomes.

15 23. The method of claim 20, wherein the sorting feature includes a plurality of
player-selectable elements in response to a third of the start-feature outcomes, and
wherein the step of at least partially sorting the collection of scrambled objects
includes progressively sorting the string of scrambled letters to form the word in
response to successive selection by a player of the player-selectable elements.

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24. The method of claim 18, wherein the sorting feature includes a non-interactive
mode and a player interactive mode, the non-interactive mode being triggered by a
first of the start-feature outcomes, the player interactive mode being triggered by a
second of the start-feature outcomes, the sorting feature including a plurality of
25 player-selectable elements when in the player interactive mode.

25. A method of operating a gaming machine controlled by a processor in
response to a wager, the method comprising:

executing a game of chance, including a sorting feature, on at least one visual
30 display, the sorting feature including a string of scrambled letters of
the alphabet; and

rearranging the letters in the string of scrambled letters during operation of the sorting feature.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the step of rearranging the letters includes
5 partially sorting the string of letters, and further including awarding a first award in response to the string of letters being partially sorted.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the step of rearranging the letters includes
10 fully sorting the string of letters to form a word, and further including awarding a second award in response to the string of letters being fully sorted.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein the game of chance includes a primary game including a plurality of rotatable symbol-bearing slot reels, and wherein the step of executing the game of chance includes:
15 rotating and stopping the reels to place symbols on each reel in visual association with at least one pay line; and
executing the sorting feature in response to a start-feature outcome based on the symbols appearing on the stopped reels.

20 29. The method of claim 25, wherein the game of chance includes a primary game, and wherein the step of executing the game of chance includes executing the primary game and then executing the sorting feature in response to a start-feature outcome generated by the primary game.